

Heritage of Planned Socialist Towns in Albania

“Kombinati i Tekstileve Stalin” - Tirana

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ABSTRACT:

Processes such as design, construction, industrialization, de-industrialization, internal migration, external migration, life closely connected with the factory and the aim to emancipate the society by means of industrialization, gives to the planned socialist towns in Albania, a certain interest in terms of studies on urban design and sustainable development issues. In the last 20 years, on the way to the democratization of the country, a certain lack of interest has been inspired and felt on the built heritage, as part of a general cultural behaviour in confront of an unwanted past, characterized by a sort of “decomunization”. Today, we are witness on a totally different situation that also needs a different approach, a more technical than political. The heritage of the planned socialist cities is various and complex. Acting on the basis of limited symbolic resources, actively construct and promote a “de-ideologised” image of a young, green town. It includes realization of projects of a great value, which putting aside the ideology and propaganda, are theoretically a good example for the contemporary society which has to leave to the past the bad taste of the old politics and direct herself to a more sustainable way of thinking, considering the city as a resource in itself, which has to be used in all the possible ways it offers.

KEYWORDS: Socialist city; Ex-Socialist Community; Modern Heritage; Conservation; Implementation.

1 PLANNED CITIES IN THE HISTORY

Merlin e Choay in the “Dictionnaire de l'urbanisme et de l'aménagement” a planned city means "city planned, the creation of which is administratively decided". New cities were built in all ages and in different places. From ancient Egyptian, Greeks and Romans until today, when the "planned cities" are industrialized countries' response to the problems created by the rapid and chaotic growth of large urban centers.

Ebenezer Howard in its publication "Tomorrow: a peaceful path to real reform" in 1889, thought to control the rampant London urban development through the building of "garden cities". This theoretical proposal, successfully implemented for the first time in Letchworth Garden City (1903), was experimented later in all the industrialized countries while maintaining the general principles and creating special features in each of them.

We can distinguish today, three types of planned established cities: the "New Towns" in England or "le Villes Nouvelles" in France in response to the growth of the metropolis, the "Industrial Cities" in Russia and the countries of East Europe planned for sheltering the workers of big industrial plants and the

"new capitals" as Brasilia and Chandigar born for political reasons. In this case we will deal with the study of new industrial cities, built in the period of Stalinism, not only in Russia but also in other parts of the Warsaw Pact.

2 "SOCGOROD" – THE SOCIALIST CITY

Miljutin in his book on socialist architecture defines the base lines for a modern and revolutionary design method worthy of the Marxist theory. With a deep content of propaganda he presents problems of capitalist cities, developed in history as a result of the operation of market economy. New socialist city, by his opinion initially consists on modifying the lifestyle considering the conditions of Russian society, in this case emphasis the shift from the individual interests to the society.

One of the examples that Miljutin appreciates in the capitalist urbanization is the attempt to the "deurbanization" through "garden cities" which according to him is not compatible with the capitalist system. He writes "the most important tasks you must face, is to avoid the distance from the city to the countryside." The historic city that was established on the basis of commercial principles, have to leave place to the socialist industrialized city and in this case he quotes Marx in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, who says: "To combine agricultural work with the work in factory and gradually eliminate the differences between city and the country." So industrialization is seen as key to the emancipation of rural society which bears a pronounced retardation in comparison with the city.

The positioning of the New Town for Miljutin on behalf of the Marxist theory is described as follows "the new socialist city, should be positioned near the natural resources taking into account economic, political and natural issues rather than historical factors that, according to him, have been giving precedence to the city markets (...) should be analyzed strictly elements in "strengths" and "weakness" for each case, without becoming prey of crazy fantasies ", in this case illustrates the image of the urban congestions in the city of New York.

The socialist city considering Marx, theoretically was thought to be a simple construction expressing the "model" for the new realistic society. However, in further interpretations the model was deformed, frequently referring to the architectural process with formal vocabulary taken from other countries as a sort of revival, recycling old styles of the western cultures. This experience will be exhibited for the first time in exhibition named "Ville et Revolution", in 1968 in Paris. The Russian architects of the twenties, considered the construction of the surrounding environment and the formation of a new society as a single problem. Since then, they realized (thanks to the revolutionary context) a question that has been realized some years later in the rest of Europe, which designing urban space is not only a question of positioning volumes more or less well adapted to the elementary functions but, (to borrow the expression of Moisej Ginzburg, leader of the constructivist movement), the relation between urban space and objects in it, acts as a "social condenser". So, these are the matrix of reflection for the new society. Matrix because it is inside of these buildings that the old man will become a new man: reflection, because conceived in the image of the future society, the realization of which will bring to life every day a new dimension, the need for which is still felt.

Perhaps, the most studied "social condenser" could be the house. It is the house of the old type that best realize and manifests the taste and the ideology of the petty-bourgeois, which considering the Marxist theory, has to be cancelled if we don't want to think of a new society in a traditional way. It is the idea of the "reconstruction of the way of life" that is of a central importance to the development of the socialist city.

The revolutionary concept of the socialist rational city, formally was expressed with a horizontal quality an absence of hierarchy. This means the values of the periphery becomes of the same importance with those of the center. In the beginning of the Twenties', authorities are not concerned much with the expression of architecture, than with the scientific planning of the new cities. Architects in this period are left to themselves, generating ideas that are almost never realized. The "Culture One" as called by

Peperny, is important to understand the physical principles of planning new socialist cities, which almost didn't change during all the Stalinist period.

3 STALINIST ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE TWO

In his book "Architecture in the age of Stalin", the author – Vladimir Peperny, divides Russian culture of post revolution into two periods: Culture One and Culture Two. The first period - Culture One, is primarily based on events that belong to the years 1920 to 1932', when it was hold the famous international competition for the Palace of Soviets and soon after with the government resolution "On the Restructuring of Literary – Artistic Organizations". Culture Two, begins in the year 1932 and ends up after the death of Stalin in March 1953, when Nikita Khrushchev made his speech at the "All-Union Conference of Builders, Architects and Construction Industry Workers" in November 1954.

Culture Two is characterized by transferring the values in the center. Society ossifies and crystallizes. The authorities start showing an interest in architecture both as a practical means for securing the population and as a spatial expression of the new center-based system of qualities. In this case architecture becomes symmetric, losing the dynamic expression of the rationality. This period is characterized by what we call "Stalinist architecture".

The main characteristics of architecture in this period, is described as "melting and hardening". In a very propagandistic way, buildings become more glorious representing a fake reality where the future was postponed indefinitely, promoting a heroic expression of architecture with a language that was borrowed by the western culture as a return to academism, mixing together baroque with expressionism and art nouveau. The idea of eternal structures puts engineers and builders in serious difficulties. In the First Congress of Soviet Architects it was said "The structure must not only be durable for a certain period of time, but must last forever, as the whole idea of our society is eternal." Architects were designing building and considering them historical even before their construction went to the end, like in the case of the Moscow Metro.

Architects that previously were designing the socialist city with its rationale and mechanic essence soon their style was converted into the "Russian Empire" style. Miljutin and Vesnin themselves learned to speak the language of the new culture.

This architectural language is present in different buildings constructed in Albania during the years 1952 – 1964 by Russian architects which were followed by Albanian architects who were educated in the Soviet Union during those years. Kombinat is a main example, because of the fact that it concerns an entire urban environment, presenting different typologies from the manufactures, public buildings, to the different typologies of the residence.

4 THE CASE OF KOMBINAT

Kombinat is more than just a quarter of Tirana. Not all neighbourhoods, inside or outside the city, have something to show. Processes such as industrialization, de-industrialization, internal migration, external migration, life closely connected with the factory, the emancipation of the woman, gives to this neighbourhood a deeper meaning than just a part of the city of Tirana. Kombinat which lies to the south-west about 6 miles from the center is a neighbourhood that has always manifested a certain autonomy and identity of its own. It has been considered almost a separated city by its residents but not only, to the other side, Tirana residents considered it as a city of workers. From the urban point of view, there was a real barrier separating the area from the rest of the city. Just like cities are separated from each other, there is an industrialized suburb, then agricultural fields, then again another city suburb, than another city center. The same thing was happening once with Kombinat, it was clearly divided from Tirana through the industrial areas to the west and soon after the agricultural fields of the area Yzberisht, which was a border village to the capital. Also, inside this complex coexisted the periphery and a center, although separated within a small distance. Today such a limit does not exist anymore, as a result of the big sprawl that has been happening on Tirana after the 90', although, this limit is visible when you take a careful look on the buildings typologies. But when, by who, and for what has been built an self-sufficient urban settlement

within the territory of Tirana? To give answer to this question it is necessary to make a short observation in history.

Before the World War II, Albania accounted for slightly more than 1 million inhabitants, of these about 80% was living in rural settlements. Industrial system was already inexistent and dependent on foreign investment. It was exported only agro-alimentary products and raw minerals. After the war, Albania has become part of the east communist front with the absolute priority for the modernization of the under emancipated population. Industrialization under Marxist economic theory was not simply a choice for economic reasons, but also a system that would create new social relations as a basis for the development of socialist society, this was the objective of the Government of Albania during The Fifties. A very high target taking into account the situation of the country considering that in those years it was meet about 60% illiteracy, impossible to achieve without financial aid from abroad. First aids were coming from Yugoslavia until Albania starts a close friendship with Moscow in 1948, right after Russia broke up the relations with Yugoslavia of Tito.

One of the first Russian investments was directed to the construction of the industrial plant that was called "Kombinati i Textileve Stalin" a textile manufacture that has been built where previously existed two villages - Yzberisht and Sharra. This was a location were along the western radial road buid by Italians in 1939 to connect Tirana with the city of Kavaja. Also in this location they had previously build a military complex and a hospital, right where is today the Kombinat Hospital

For the construction of the factory, the first position was selected in the north-west part of the city, near Tirana River where the works had already started without an adequate project. This position was selected as favourable for reasons of electric energy supply that would happen from Tirana city. In 1949, the Albanian government decided the displacement of textile industry to the south-west of the city as a respond to the request of the Russian technicians that suggested building a separate power plant for the factory, increasing its independence in relation to the city, which at this time had serious shortcomings in power supply. In July 1949, Enver Hoxha himself was inaugurating the beginning of the construction works by put the first stone for the new industrial plant. The construction was finalized in October 1951 and the inauguration was made on the anniversary of the "Great Revolution of October". To honour the Russian-Albanian friendship finalized with financial and technical support, the industrial plant was named Stalin and in the central square it was placed his statue, which will be torn down later in the year 90'.

"Kombinati i Tekstileve Stalin" was not the only industrial complex being built at this time, others are being built in other cities, but in this case the complex appeared as an integrated urban configuration with factory and a residential area, making this neighbourhood a symbol of the Socialist Revolution in Albanian (citing the propaganda of the time). Subsequent extensions of this neighbourhood today join the city of Tirana and surrounding countryside, but the initial group of housing, built with the Russian project in Stalinist architectural style is a landmark that signs the beginning of an epochal change for the Albanian people.

5 THE BIRTH OF THE NEW HABITAT

The new neighbourhood was quickly populated by residents coming from every corner of the country, a fact that makes this neighbourhood unique from the social point of view. Kombinat was known as the "neighbourhood of women" because the process in textile factory was judged more adapted for women. This was an important emancipating factor for the society, considering that the new neighbourhood residents where coming from remote areas of the country where families had a totalitarian behaviour, difficult to tolerate the displacement of young people (especially women) to large cities. For the time, the complex was considered an emancipated and extravagant neighbourhood such as the old families of the city of Tirana avoided to send their daughters to work in the factory.

As the neighbourhood was growing up, the beginning was very difficult because they were built only a few residences and most of the population had taken refuge in military barracks that were built by the Italians during the protectorate period. The construction of the neighbourhood was made mostly by male workers and prisoners, while the direction was entrusted exclusively Russian specialists.

Given the distance from Tirana city, in Kombinat could not be built just a banal suburb with industrial buildings and residences, but a small city with independent functions and new social model that reflected the Marxist theory. In this sense, the designers group consisting mainly of Russians had to design everything, within the minimal details. So, in addition to industrial facilities, were designed all the elements of a typical urban settlement with roads, residences, schools, kindergarten, hospital, police buildings, public greenery, etc. There were foreseen 5,000 apartments which calculating the average of 5 members per family, it was a neighbourhood made up of 30,000 residents. In the late 50' the neighbourhood was not a "distant suburb" but increasingly converted in an autonomous town. In addition to essential services, other services have been built for leisure like a theatre, cinema, library and sports facilities. There were created artistic organizations which played theatrical shows and parties where organized every weekend.

It should also be noted that the urban design, was giving priority to the public space in relation to private space: this trend is characteristic of all the industrial cities, in this case was also an ideological vision of a society where public spaces and the promotion of social life had absolute priority.

6 KOMBINAT TODAY - PROBLEMATICS

Today the industrial plant "Kombinati Tekstileve Stalin" does not exist anymore. It remains only the exterior walls in form of ruins that prove the past. The quarter of the workers exists yet, but is not that of that time. The old population of the textile workers, technicians, and managers have become utterly a minority considering the number of population that arrived in the past 20 years. The former urban configuration has changed: from an urban plant inspired from "Soviet Rationality", now we perceive a spontaneous type of urbanism and architecture that includes fantasies of every type, from individual villas to mansions with more stories (fortunately only two nearby the historical complex). Now, it seems difficult to distinguish the borders of the former "satellite city", they are involved inside a urban reality that has expanded as oil stain. At this point, it comes to mind the observation of the famous French urban sociologist Chombart de Lauwe: "The city is a representation of the society drawn on the ground (...) city at the same time appears as a material paint of complex social and cultural issues..." in this case we must add economical issues.

Kombinat population has incremented from 16,000 inhabitants in 91', to 61,000 in 2009 though this is only an official number, it is thought that there live about 90 thousand inhabitants. There is also spread the opinion that in this area, growth will never be completed, because people that come from the countryside seat in this area which is near to Tirana while prices are cheaper. Does not exist anymore cohesion between old residents and new arrivals that once was a main characteristic, also It seems that there is no more that civic conscience to which once boasted Kombinat. It has become one of the most problematic neighbourhoods of the city, where the level of unemployment and crime is among the highest in the region.

Public spaces is reduced only to the central compound of the main square, in the former piazza "Stalin" and the green boulevard that connects with the hills in the south. The two main axes and the characteristic accompanying green spaces once promoted public life, today have become an informal market that seems to accompany visitors all the time.

The representative buildings, such as the entrance to the complex, the professional school, the house of culture that existed once and lined with dignity the main square, today are living a private fragmentation and drastically altered functions. Factories that once were considered "the cathedral of the proletariat" today are destroyed in the majority and converted into informal dwellings of homeless residents who have come from every corner of Albania. Former power plant that once supplied the factory and workers' neighbourhood in a very organic way today is just a left over. There in the center of the main square, where once stood the statue of Stalin "oriented with proud" to the workers' homes as a witness of "proletarian revolution", today lies nothing, just a pedestal waiting for the next monument to which will depend the future sort of the "ideal city".

In the last 5 years there has been some intervention by local authorities for the reconstruction of roads, schools or hospitals. After 2005 the facades of the complex gained the monument status. It was carried out a cleaning operation on the abusive interventions that were seriously damaging the image of the representative spaces. Nonetheless these interventions were limited in partial operations more as a reactive character preceding.

7 SIMILAR CASE STUDIES

The planned Soviet towns are also called “mono industrial towns” (Cinis, Dremaite, Kalm, 2008), “new socialist towns” (Bernhardt, 2005), “spaces of socialism” (Stenning, 2005), etc. The well-known planned Soviet towns are Nowa Huta and Tychy in Poland, Prypiat and Slavutich in Ukraine, Novoplotsk and Soligorsk in Belarus, Eisenhutzenstadt and Schwedt in Germany, Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria, Angarsk, Komsomolsk, Magnitogorsk in Russia, Šturovo in Slovakia, Sillamae in Estonia, Stucka (now Aizklaukle) in Latvia, Bánytereny and Ajka in Hungary.

Several strategies are being applied to the socialist heritage: spatial reframing, spatial isolation and narrative reframing. The spatial reframing is the case of the Berlin Wall: the Wall was mostly destroyed, and its remnants are — “museumified” and divorced from their original social, cultural, and political context. The spatial isolation is the case of the Budapest sculpture park. In 1990, the city council decided to remove political statues of Hungary’s socialist era and relegate them to a park on the edge of the city. The park was opened for tourists in 1993 and became one of the major tourist attractions in Budapest. This particular event also includes some elements of the narrative reframing, as it indicates a shift from legitimizing the Socialist regime to mocking it. However, narrative reframing is best exemplified by the case of a governmental palace in Romania, where the history of the building is reframed by silencing the socialist past and accentuating its link with the very best of Romanian architects and craftsmen. The socialist past is not exactly erased. In a certain way it is remembered: the socialist symbols are exposed in order to sneer and mimic the former political regime, to bear witness to its ferocities, or to emphasize the history of anti-socialist resistance. The active processing of the past makes history more palatable to the present time and identity, on one hand, while also making the place more attractive for investments and more suitable for integration into national and global economies, on the other.

7.1 Tychy, Poland

Tychy is a city in southern Poland, Silesia, about twenty kilometres from Katowice. Tychy was first documented in 1467 and developed into a small urban settlement. New developments started on 4 October 1950, when the socialist Government Executives made a decision to build the so-called New Tychy. Construction started in 1951. New districts were designated by letters of the alphabet. The first two neighbourhood units, A and B, were constructed as an example of socialist realist architecture (Stalinist style), known for a large number of architectural details, ornaments and sculptures, such as a female worker holding a trowel, a miner and a steelworker, and a mother with a child.

The incorporation of established communities with their own identities and life practices resulted in the absence of one cultural centre and made the town's common identity problematic. After the change of political regime in 1990, Tychy was divided again as five counties and villages were separated from the town. The collective identity of Tychy involved contradictions between old inhabitants and newcomers to the town, a lack of a shared cultural centre, and noticeable disintegration of the town into separate housing estate communities. Though officially celebrated as an outpost of socialism, the town was popularly referred to as a loose collection of large housing estates, a ‘socialist dormitory’, a city with no character’, a bedroom in a socialist style’, an unshaped city’, a desert’, or a workers’ lodging house for Silesia. Today, Tychy is known as a new investment and for its successful economic development, yet the town’s identity, socialist past, and socialist heritage remain ambiguous issues.

Having been constructed as the socialist urban and industrial outpost, with little or no symbolic resources for building new pro-European and pro-capitalist identities, Tychy is now seeking a new place identity in order to legitimize new capitalist developments ‘with the focus on industrial and

entrepreneurial prospective, business and investments friendly environment, highly skilled and qualified human resources, business friendly, and the omnipresent entrepreneurial spirit'. A sort of "decommunization" is taking place to Tychy.

7.2 Nowa Huta, Poland

Nowa Huta, meaning simply "new steelworks", was founded in 1949 as a new town for Poland's first steel plant, the Lenin Steelworks. The development of Nowa Huta and Hil was funded by a loan from the Soviet Union in lieu of Marshall Aid, and the town itself was popularly called Stalin's gift to Poland.

The reasons for constructing the town and the plant were mostly ideological, since coal had to be transported from Silesia and iron ore from the Soviet Union and since the products were shipped to other parts of Poland. It is broadly believed that the construction of the plant and the town was punishment for the region's weak vote in the 1946 referendum in order to remake Krakow into a proletarian city.

Situated in a suburban area of Krakow, Nowa Huta is easily accessible to tourists and has been positioned as a socialist landmark and authentic experience of socialism. As part of niche tourism, a newly emerging trend in heritage tourism,⁸⁴ the sites associated with particular historical events are marketed to consumers with shared interests. The Nowa Huta tour, offered by the municipality, includes the administrative centre of T. Sendzimir Steelworks; the Central Square; several residential districts; other outstanding buildings from the Socialist period, such as Swit Cinema, Peoples' Theatre. Their website contains a quote from The Boston Globe: Come visit historic Nowa Huta, where George Orwell's dark vision of a perfect industrial metropolis was executed with stunning precision.

These tours are conducted in an authentic, vintage automobile a Trabant or Fiat and the guides wear workers' uniforms. The tours offer first hand details of what it was like living under the Soviet occupation'. For example, tourists can visit a 1970's-style decorated apartment (Step into our time-warp apartment'), have refreshments in a communist-style restaurant, watch socialist propaganda films, and have a rare opportunity to eat pickled cucumbers and toast the good old days. There is also a tour called "the bad old days" of Communism. The local community is actively engaged in producing the self-image of Nowa Huta.

In a paradoxical way, the socialist heritage tourism is generating complex associations with the socialist past.⁹⁰ Continuous exposure to the tourists' interest and discourses imposed from the outside (Western tourists and Western travel guides) foster self-reflection and articulation of one's own past. The basis of Nowa Huta's new identity remains its socialist past. The "decommunization" has happened here not by removal, but by a narrative reframing of the socialist heritage.

8 CONCLUSIONS

Since 1990, there has been a growing amount of interest on touristic literature on the socialist heritage. The socialist heritage, which is in conflict with the new post-socialist identity, represents the unwanted past and the previous political regime; as such it is referred as a dissonance heritage. The nostalgia for the past might be experienced in different ways however, this does not mean that there is an actual desire to return to the past. Although some fractions of the population might have their own radicalized and nostalgic version of the past, the institutionalized memory, place identity and the use of the socialist heritage depends on institutional discourses.

Planned socialist towns, acting on the basis of limited symbolic resources, actively construct and promote a de-ideologized image of a young, green town. The heritage of the socialist planned cities is various and complex. It includes realization of projects of a great value which putting aside the ideology and propaganda, are theoretically a good example for the contemporary society which has to leave to the past the bad taste of the old politics and direct herself to a more sustainable way of thinking, considering the city as a resource in itself which has to be used in all the possible ways it offers.

In the last years there can be felt a growing interest in global context which generates tourism for the ex-eastern block. Many ex socialist countries are taking advance and transforming their drama into a resource, revaluating the socialist heritage and showing it with dignity to the touristic population. This

economic strategy has been of great importance especially for small towns and communities which find it hard to be integrated in the global economy.

In Albanian context there has been done a considerable effort in building new towns in the period of industrialisation of the country. There are realised at four planned socialist cities between the years 50' and 60' located mainly in the center, eastern and southern side of the country. Every one of this examples, encloses values like this mentioned above also as differences which make this cities particular in different points of view. Also from the theoretical point of view, the first planned cities of this period served as models for the later socialist planning in the years 80'. Today this towns are losing everyday their values and identity, waiting for a new type of planning, a more sustainable one which has to be based more on real potentials in order to project their futures in globalised world.

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